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# **Nigeria: Population Problems and Political Stability**

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**A Research Paper**

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*ALA 86-10041  
September 1986*

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# **Nigeria: Population Problems and Political Stability**

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**A Research Paper**

This paper was prepared by [ ] Office  
of African and Latin American Analysis. It was  
coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. [ ]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
directed to the Chief, Africa Division, ALA [ ]

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September 1986*



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**Nigeria:  
Population Problems and  
Political Stability**

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**Summary**

*Information available  
as of 29 August 1986  
was used in this report.*

Nigeria, the richest and most populous state in black Africa, has served over the years as a reliable source of crude oil for the United States and its Western allies, and as a supporter in Third World forums. Nigeria's explosive population growth against a backdrop of dwindling oil revenues, however, not only poses serious domestic challenges to the regime of moderate President Ibrahim Babangida, but over time is likely to create conditions conducive to serious political instability that could open the door further to external meddling from Libya and Iran.

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We believe two key population trends are influencing Nigeria's socio-economic balance:

- **Rapid Population Growth.** We estimate that the Nigerian population will increase rapidly well into the next century and that this growth will act as an important constraint on efforts to achieve national unity. The current population of 105.4 million is projected to double over the next 24 years to reach 211 million by 2010.
- **A Fast-Growing Youth Population.** The majority of young people between 15 and 24 are poorly educated and lack well-paying jobs. As a group they will increasingly strain an already overloaded educational system and face dim employment prospects. Their numbers, expected to increase from today's 20 million to 30 million by 2000, will provide increasingly fertile ground for recruitment efforts by radical political leaders and religious zealots, in our view.

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This population surge, in turn, is almost certain to affect Nigeria's socioeconomic balance, and we believe a number of issues are likely to take on increasing importance in determining overall stability in Nigeria:

- **Regionalism.** We expect north-south rivalries to intensify against a background of rapid population growth, sluggish economic growth, and divisive regional competition for shrinking social and economic resources. The growth in absolute size of regional populations will put serious stress on the country's resource base. The north's 37 million people are estimated by the US Census Bureau to nearly double to 72 million by

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2010, while the south's 51 million will more than double to 105 million by 2010, and alone will equal the population of the whole of today's Nigeria. Moreover, we believe Muslim northern leaders will be especially frustrated by the ongoing migration of northern young people seeking jobs and schooling in southern cities, reinforcing the leaders' fear that their traditional power is being eroded in favor of better educated, more Western-oriented southerners. This migration is estimated to be on the increase, demographically signaling a slow, but inevitable drop in the proportionate size of the north and the middle belt in favor of the south.

- **Ethnicity.** Judging from our review of academic and US official reporting, we believe ethnic divisiveness—which parallels and reinforces regional rivalries—is also deepening under the twin threats of high population growth and a shrinking economy. The Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Ibo of the southeast will retain their approximate two-thirds share of the total population, but will each double in size over the next few decades. This growth will put increased demands on their ethnic communities and traditional leaders to secure for them the largest possible share of a dwindling supply of basic services and goods. Although the remaining 250 minority tribal groups will grow nearly as quickly as the three largest tribes, their larger size will not be an advantage, but rather will increase their need to fight for scarce national goods and services.
- **Religion.** Religious tensions, coinciding with ethnic and regional factionalism, continue to polarize Nigerians and could become even more contentious as rapid population growth aggravates deep-seated socioeconomic differences. Nationally, about 50 percent of the population is Muslim and concentrated in the north, 40 percent is Christian and lives largely in the south, and the remaining 10 percent are adherents of traditional animist beliefs and are scattered throughout the country. Religious controversy flared recently over Nigeria's membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which fueled Christian fears of a Muslim takeover of national powers. Religious unrest has not erupted on a national scale, but local outbreaks of sect-related violence are frequent, according to US Embassy reporting.

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- **Explosive City Growth.** Demographic pressures resulting from rapid population growth are intense in Nigeria's cities where nearly one-third of the total population lives. Urban ranks are swelling at an annual rate of nearly 4.5 percent, over one and one-half times the national growth rate. In addition to the rapid natural growth of the population, internal migration is also increasing city size. A vast rural-to-urban migration of some 5 million over the last decade is expected to increase threefold in the next 10 years, according to the US Census Bureau. If this occurs, the urban infrastructure—housing, power, water, sewerage, drainage, and roadways—is almost certain to deteriorate across the country. At the same time, a continuing exodus of people to the cities will intensify unemployment problems in urban areas as well as fuel the need to ensure adequate food, housing, and medical and educational services for the growing population concentrations. [ ]

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If, as we believe, Nigerian authorities remain incapable of halting the country's economic decline and are unable to find a formula to ameliorate societal divisiveness, the odds for the emergence of increased social instability will grow. An environment of increasing demands and dwindling resources, fueled by unabated population growth, could bring about conditions that would undermine moderate government and provide the opportunity for a radical regime to gain acceptance, or, alternatively, promote the spread of violence. [ ]

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**Scope Note**

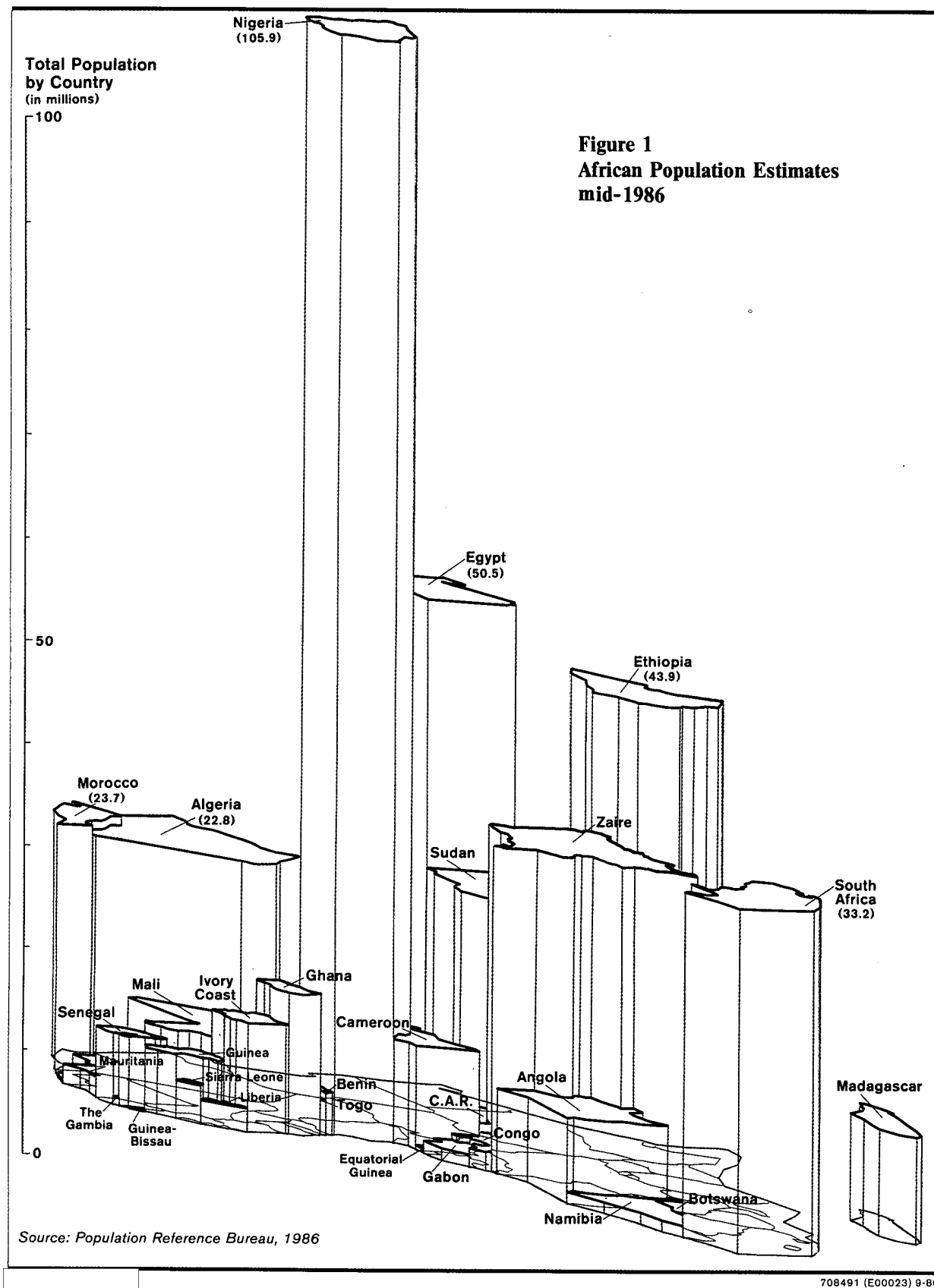
Demographic estimates and projections obtained under contract from the US Bureau of the Census are the basis for the statistical judgments made in this paper. Although data on Nigeria's demographic, social, and economic situation are often inadequate, and sometimes nonexistent, the Bureau drew on numerous sample surveys and UN estimates dating from 1932 through 1985 to estimate trends in fertility, mortality, and migration. The incomplete results of the Nigerian 1963 census were adjusted through the use of indirect demographic techniques using the survey estimates. This adjusted census base was used to make the projections. We also consulted official Nigerian sources, academic studies, and US Embassy reporting to obtain social and economic data.

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**Nigeria:  
Population Problems and  
Political Stability**

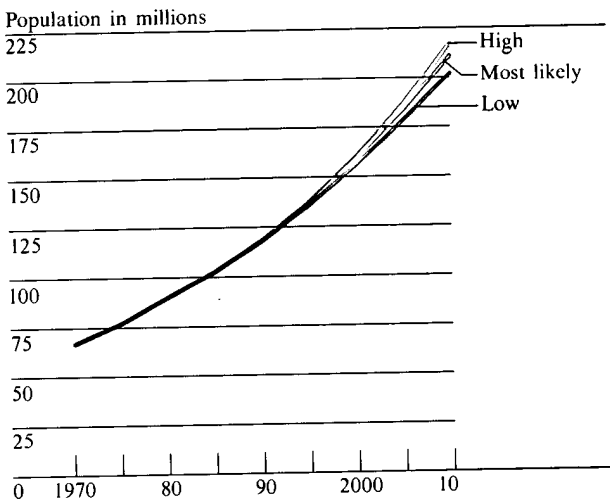
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**Introduction**

Nigeria is the demographic giant of Sub-Saharan Africa. Approximately one of every five Africans live within its boundaries, and its 105.4 million people make it more than twice the size of black Africa's next largest population, Ethiopia's 43.9 million. According to UN statistics, Nigeria is currently the 10th most populous country in the world, and demographers estimate that by 2025 it will take over fourth place, immediately behind China, India, and the USSR, and followed by the United States in fifth place. Despite its rich human resource base, however, rapidly changing central governments and a declining economy have hindered efforts to unite the diverse population into a cohesive national entity.'

This assessment focuses on Nigeria's population dynamics and the impact they have for altering the balance among regional, religious, and tribal groups, as well as the implications for rapid urbanization. These factors will be important determinants in Lagos's attempts to maintain political stability.

**Figure 2  
Nigeria: Population Growth, 1970-2010**



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1985.

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**Rapid Population Growth: The Bottom Line**

The causes of Nigeria's explosive population growth—high birth rates coupled with a more rapid decline in death rates—will be sustained and translate into high growth well into the 21st century, in our view. US Census Bureau projections show Nigeria's population doubling over the next 24 years, reaching a total of some 211 million by 2010. This figure—projecting an average yearly addition of slightly fewer than 4.5 million people—assumes a decline in both birth and death rates. If birth rates do not decline by the estimated 10 points, or if death rates drop more quickly than projected, yearly population additions will be even larger and the resulting total will be closer to 217 million.

We foresee no slowdown in this pattern of growth. Because birth rates have been so high for so long, and to a lesser degree because of the decline in mortality, there is a built-in demographic momentum for rapid growth that can be altered only by an unrealistically massive emigration, an equally unrealistic precipitous drop in fertility, or by a catastrophic loss of life. The US Census Bureau data show that Nigeria has a very young population; approximately 45 percent is under 15 years of age (compared with 22 percent in developed countries). Births currently outnumber deaths by more than 2.5 to 1, a ratio that will increase to 3 to 1 in 15 years as the disproportionately large numbers of children grow older and have children of their own (see figure 3).

' There have been six military coups and eight different heads of state in Nigeria since independence from Britain in 1960.

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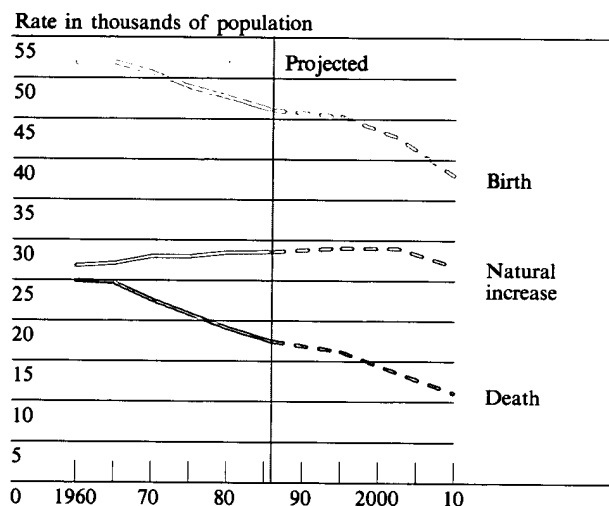
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**Figure 3**  
**Nigeria: Birth, Death, and Natural**  
**Increase Rates,<sup>a</sup> 1960-2010**



<sup>a</sup> Natural increase rate is a birth rate minus a death rate.

Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1985.

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Demographically, the six- or seven-child family of Nigeria today is decades away from the two-child replacement level, when individual couples just replace themselves, births and deaths become equal, and growth begins to taper off. Even when, and if, the two-child family becomes the norm, the population will continue to increase. It will take 50 years before the large numbers of youth are no longer replaced by even larger new generations, and growth stops. Theoretically, if replacement-level fertility were to begin immediately, Nigeria would still grow by another 80 to 100 percent due to the momentum inherent in its youthful age structure.

We believe that Nigeria's failure to effectively address the population question precludes a significant drop in the growth rate through the end of this century. Data from the Nigerian portion of the World Fertility Survey of 1982 reveal that, while women have six or seven children, they would prefer to have more, and that only 6 percent use family planning. A new draft population policy calling for enhanced

family planning and health programs is currently under consideration by the Nigerian Government. The draft, formulated by a national consultative group with assistance from international donors and sponsored by the Ministry of Health, asserts that family planning programs are the most effective and low-cost measures for controlling social problems and stemming rapid growth in the shortest possible time. The government has taken no public stand on the issue as yet, but the Nigerian press has opened a lively debate both for and against the new initiative.

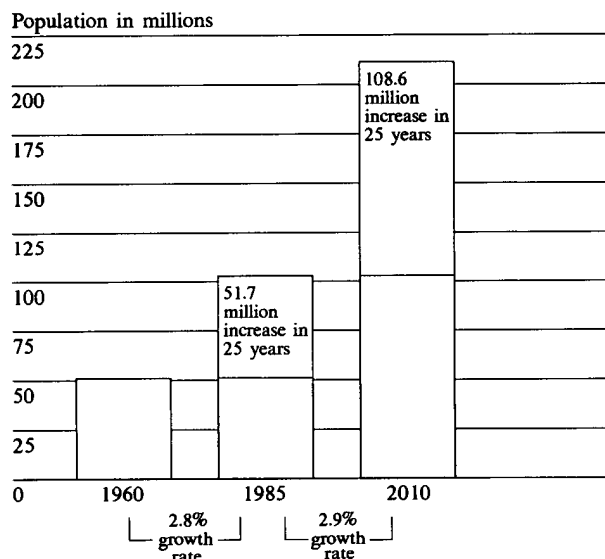
According to experts working with Third World countries where substantial fertility decline has occurred, programs as sensitive as family planning have little chance of success unless there is strong support from the highest levels of government and grassroots involvement in planning and managing outreach programs—elements that have been absent in Nigeria's case. Political caution, rather than energetic programming, has characterized Nigeria's approach to family planning policy in the past. During the 1970s and early 1980s, successive governments reacted to rapid growth and high fertility by launching development programs to try to meet growing social and economic needs, but avoided policies that dealt directly with the birth rate and thus would be controversial, according to Nigerian planning documents. The government's recent willingness to propose a new population policy specifically naming family planning, however, may finally signal the beginning of serious efforts to grapple with the country's difficult population problems.

Rapid population growth will clearly intensify the problem of achieving any meaningful degree of social and economic development in Nigeria. At a growth rate of about 2.9 percent annually, the population is increasing by more than 15 percent every five years. According to the Health Ministry, Nigeria would have to double its food production and provision of health services, water supply, housing, sanitation, and electricity over the next 20 years in order to maintain the present, but already inadequate, standard of living—an unattainable goal, in our view (see figures 4 and 5).

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**Figure 4**  
**Nigeria: Compounding Population Growth, 1960-2010**



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1985.

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### The Fast-Growing Youth Population

From a manpower perspective, Nigeria's demographic surge is having its most profound impact on the youth population. While population growth overall seems almost certain to outpace government capabilities to meet social and economic needs, rapid growth in the young adult age group may pose a further complicating factor in Nigeria. Various academic and government studies point to the youth sector as a factor inducing political instability.<sup>2</sup> We believe that in the Nigerian case, young people in the 15-to-24 age group—frustrated by unmet expectations for education and employment—constitute a potentially volatile group that can present a ready audience for radical political and religious leaders. In our view, this sector of society is likely to emerge as a major source of social and political unrest.

Youths comprise slightly over one-third of all persons of working ages—those between 15 and 64. Today, there are nearly 20 million youths searching for jobs or advanced training in an economy that has been shrinking since 1981. Their numbers will swell to 30 million by 2000, a consequence of especially high population growth rates in the 1970s and early 1980s. We estimate that there will be approximately 40 million in this age bracket by 2010, an increase which will only intensify this group's potential impact on Nigeria's social and political life (see figure 6).

### Employment

The absence of jobs, especially for educated youth, is a major element leading to serious youth alienation. Indeed, academic studies indicate that, when young people are denied an opportunity to secure even a first job, their unemployment can become a major ingredient for future political instability. Youths are now the victims of a stagnant labor market; over the past six years, the labor force has moved from manpower shortages to growing surpluses, according to Western academicians and reports by Nigerian labor unions. The US Embassy expects that this prolonged period of high unemployment will wear down the patience of Nigerians over the next several years and raise the potential for outbreaks of serious social unrest.

Although labor force data are notoriously inadequate, Nigerian estimates show that approximately 70 percent of the unemployed are under 25. Some 108,000 students are now enrolled in Nigerian universities, and education officials estimate that 60,000 university graduates over the past three years have yet to find employment. The highest unemployment level, however, is among the 614,000-per-year secondary school graduates, according to Nigerian manpower experts. At the bottom rung are primary school graduates, who also expect a job in the modern sector, according to the US Embassy.

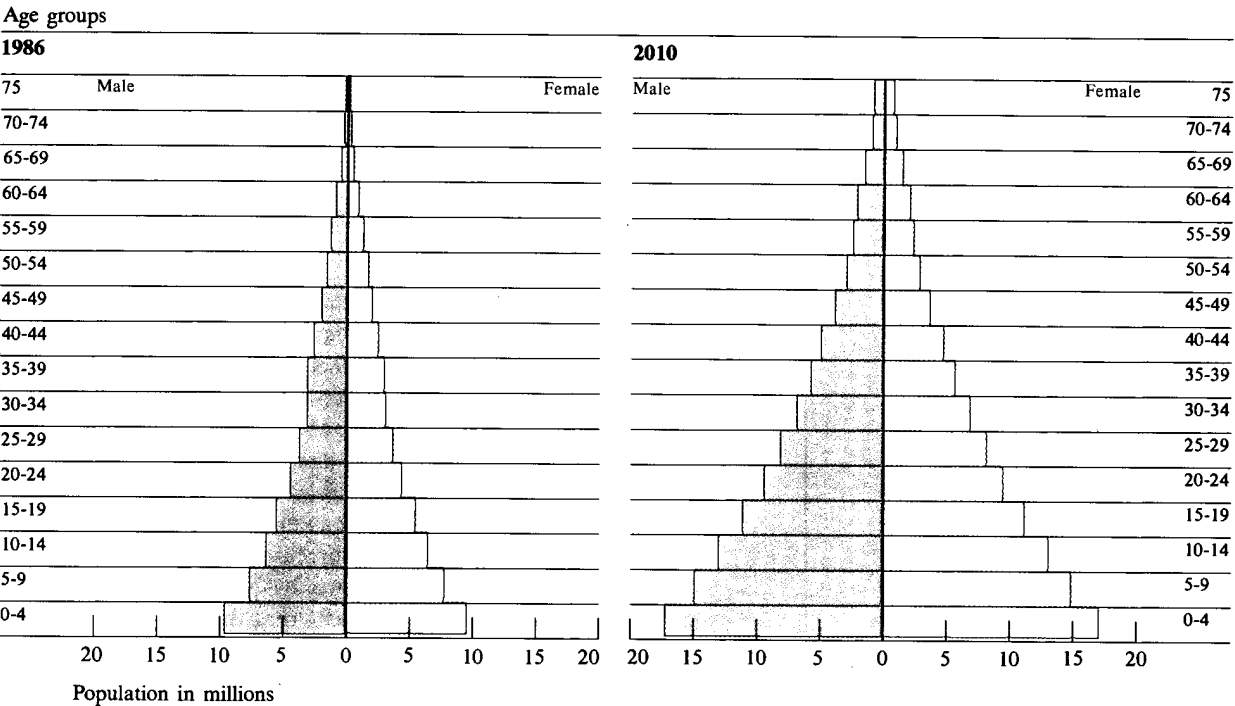
### Education

Neither the expectation of attaining higher education nor that of upward mobility through education appears to be coming true for Nigerian youth today. The majority have only a primary education, most finding

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**Figure 5**  
**Nigeria: Population Pyramids, 1986 and 2010**



Source: US Bureau of the Census, 1985.

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it difficult or impossible to win places in secondary schools or universities because of rising costs and lack of facilities, according to US Embassy reporting. Secondary and higher education graduates discover their skills inadequate or unneeded in a contracting modern-sector job market, according to Embassy sources. Meantime, austerity measures are shrinking the already inadequate number of trained teachers, school buildings, and supplies, according to Education Ministry officials. World Bank data for 1982—even before the most recent deterioration in the economy—show that, while nearly all children in the primary ages go to school, only 16 percent are enrolled in secondary school, and 3 percent in higher education. As a consequence, undereducated and unemployed

young people are pushed into the streets or subsistence society of rural areas, where, in our judgment, they are likely to blame the central government for depriving them of opportunity.

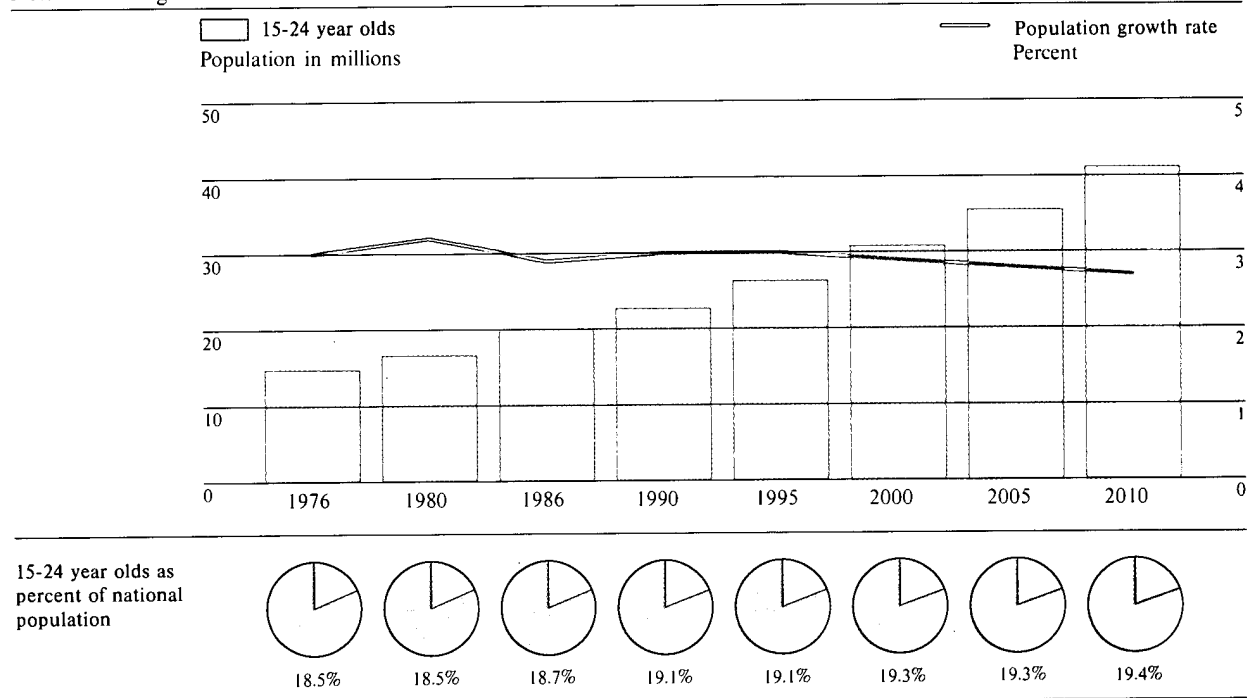
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We believe the potential for violent unrest is especially high on university campuses. The US Embassy reports that Nigerian students are politically aware and have a reputation for speaking out on issues through student organizations. President Babangida, who took power in a military coup last August, initially received student support when he announced the restoration of free speech and lifted the bans on

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**Figure 6**  
**Nigeria: Youth Growth Persists Despite Slowed Growth Rate, 1976-2010**

Note scale change



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student organizations. Subsequently, however, controversial questions such as Nigeria's membership in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the proposed institution of Islamic law courts in non-Muslim areas, and debate over acceptance of an IMF program have proved divisive issues. The honeymoon between government and students ended abruptly last May when a wave of protests against police brutality swept many university campuses, according to the Nigerian press. We believe violent student protests will become more frequent if, as seems likely, Nigerian leaders prove unable to stem economic decline or resolve contentious political issues.

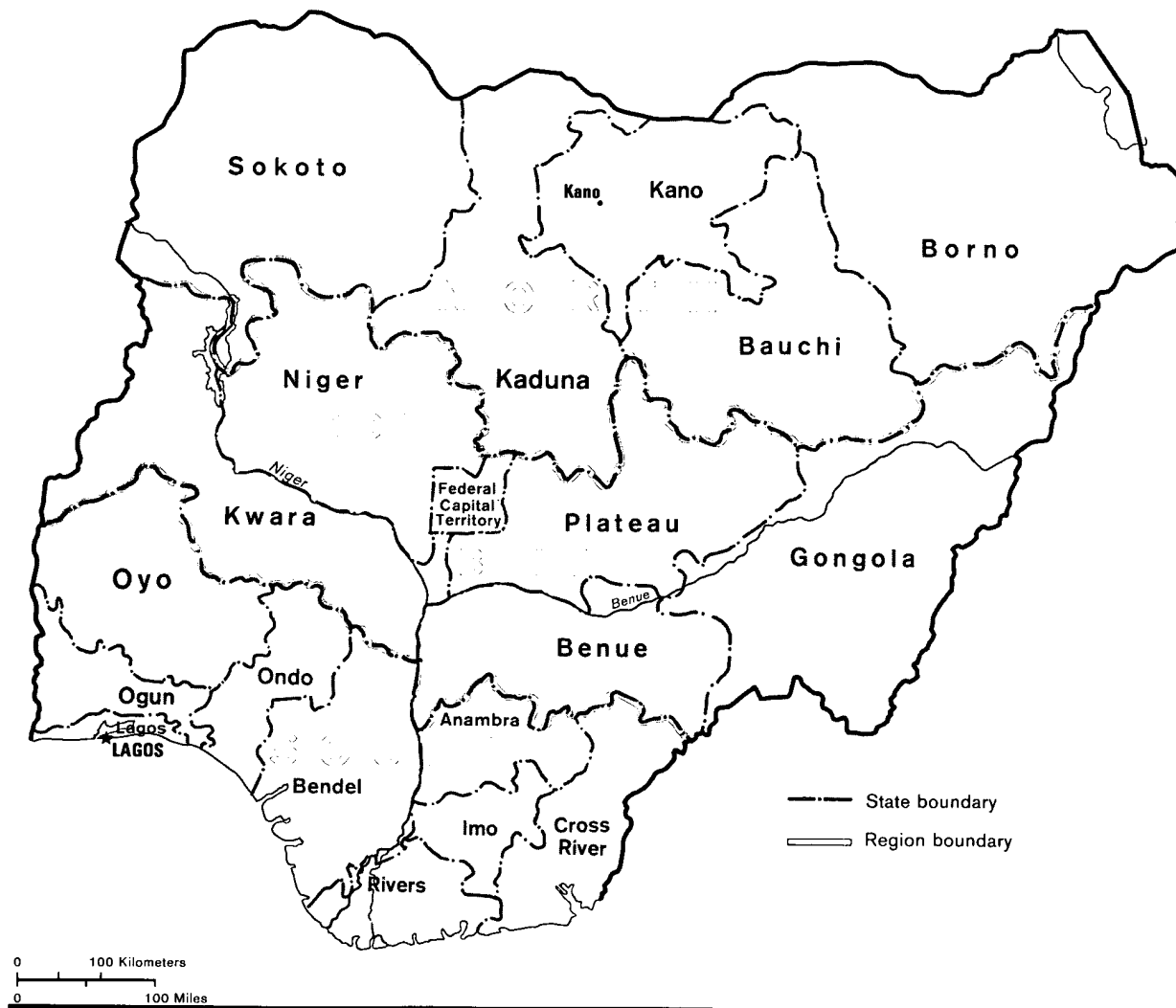
#### **Regional, Ethnic, and Religious Divisions**

We believe that the rapid rise in population coupled with slow economic growth will intensify longstanding rivalries between regional, ethnic, and religious groups as the size of the per capita economic pie declines. With fewer resources to pass on, the central government will find it increasingly difficult to avert open conflict between the various groups amid the escalating competition for dwindling economic and social resources needed to support their burgeoning populations.

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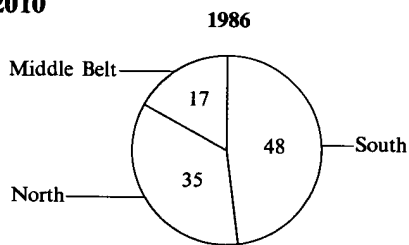
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**Figure 7**  
**Nigeria's States and Regions**

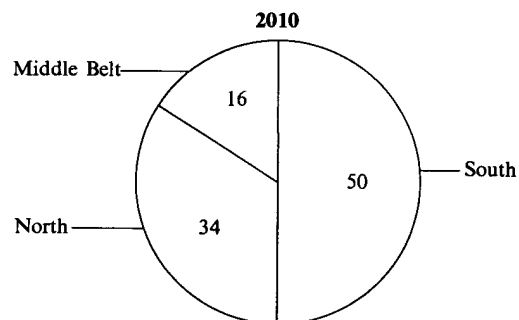


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**Regions as a Percent of Total Population, 1986-2010**



Total population = 105,448,000



Total population = 211,449,000

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**Nigeria: Regional and State  
Populations, 1986 to 2010**

<b>North</b>				<b>Middle Belt</b>			
	Population (millions)		Growth Rate, 1986-2010 (percent)		Population (millions)		Growth Rate, 1986-2010 (percent)
	1986	2010			1986	2010	
<b>Total</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>71.6</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>34.5</b>	<b>2.8</b>
Bauchi	5.1	10.8	3.1	Benue	3.7	6.1	2.1
Borno	5.7	11.6	2.9	Gongola	5.4	11.5	3.1
Kaduna	8.2	17.0	2.8	Kwara	3.2	6.4	2.8
Kano	10.7	20.7	2.8	Niger	1.6	2.7	2.1
Sokoto	7.1	11.6	2.0	Plateau	3.8	7.8	3.0

<b>South</b>				<b>West</b>			
<b>East</b>	Population (millions)		Growth Rate, 1986-2010 (percent)	<b>West</b>	Population (millions)		Growth Rate, 1986-2010 (percent)
	1986	2010			1986	2010	
<b>Total</b>	<b>19.7</b>	<b>34.9</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>31.2</b>	<b>70.4</b>	<b>3.4</b>
Anambra	5.0	7.2	1.5	Bendel	4.6	9.0	2.9
Cross River	4.0	5.8	1.5	Lagos	6.4	20.0	4.7
Imo	6.7	13.5	2.9	Ogun	3.6	7.8	3.2
Rivers	3.9	8.4	3.2	Ondo	6.2	13.2	3.1
				Oyo	10.3	20.3	2.8

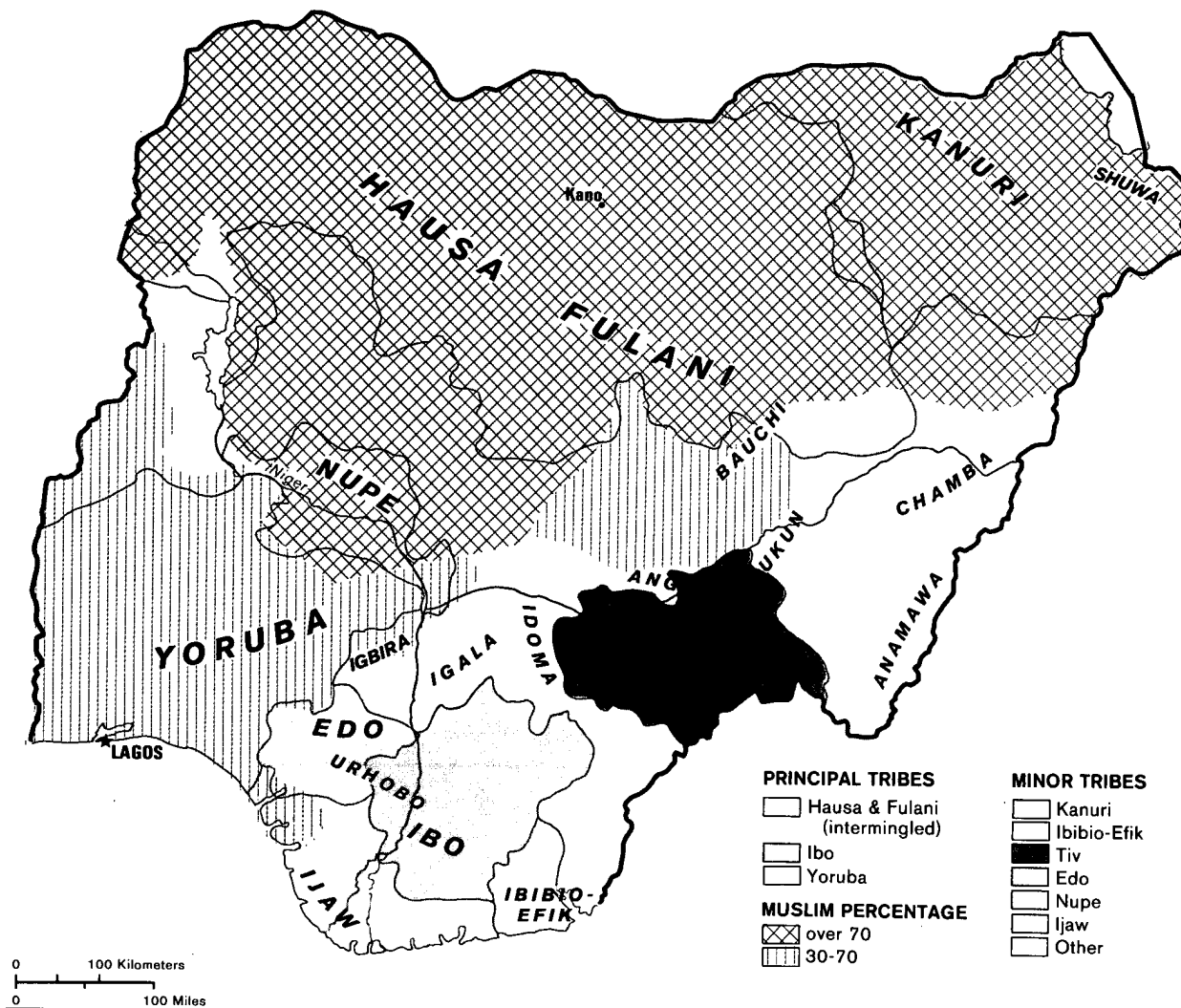
Note: Regional groups are estimated by CIA on the basis of historical, geographical, and tribal considerations. They do not imply tribal, religious, or political homogeneity. Population data for states are from the US Bureau of the Census.

**Regional and Ethnic Tensions**

The demographic composition and rapid growth of the population, along with intense regional loyalties for ethnic homelands, explain in part the nature of the present regional and ethnic divisiveness and give indications that these rivalries are likely to intensify in the future. Nearly two-thirds of the population belong to three major tribes—the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Ibo in the east—that aggressively compete for favored treatment by the central government. This political struggle can be traced through the efforts by former regimes to restructure Nigeria's regional boundaries. The three

principal regions at the time of independence became four by 1963, followed by a complete breakdown during the civil war from 1967 to 1970 caused by the former eastern region's (Biafra's) threatened secession. After the war, states were formed—first 12, and by 1976 the present 19—which broke up the large regional bases of the majority tribes and granted some measure of autonomy to ethnic minorities, particularly in the middle belt states that occupy the center of the country (see inset, "Regionalism and the Population Census Fiascoes").

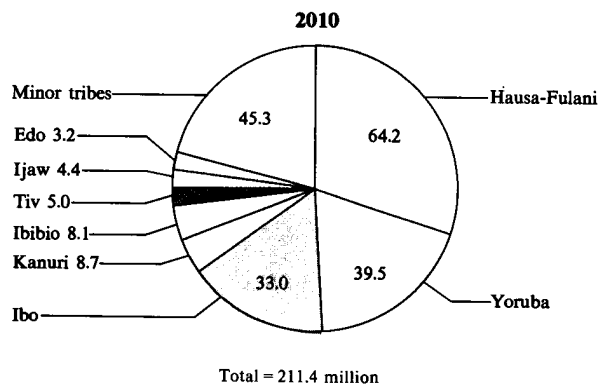
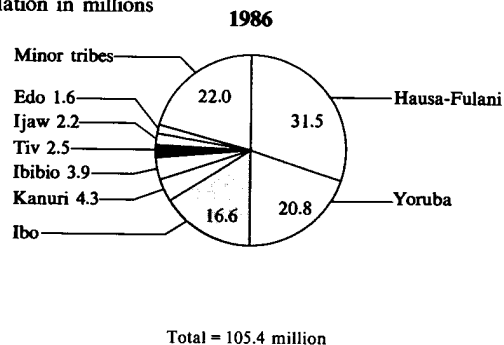
**Figure 8**  
**Nigeria's Tribal and Religious Distribution**



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**Population by Tribe, 1986 and 2010**

Population in millions



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Although the approximately 250 minority tribes have gained readier access to the smaller state bureaucracies resulting from the regional breakup, the overwhelming size of the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Ibo groups and their geographic concentrations perpetuate their ethnic advantage. High growth rates for all groups, estimated to be between 2.8 and 3.2 percent by the US Bureau of the Census, assure that all of the tribal populations will double in size over the next two and one-half decades, leaving the present tribal percentages nearly static between now and 2010. The larger size of each group, especially if the economy does not have commensurate growth, will mean the scramble for basic social and economic services will become even more intense (see inset, "Economic and Social Disparities").

**Growth Imbalances.** The demographic imbalance in regional size and growth further aggravates ethnic divisiveness and contributes to the longstanding north-south conflict. Nigeria's northern and southern regions each are many times larger than most African nations, and, at their current rate of growth, almost certainly will provide colossal management challenges for the government in the future. With 51 million people, the south by itself could be the most populous country in Africa, and the north's 37 million could give it the fourth-largest population of black Africa's 48 states. Projected to grow by 3 percent annually, the southern population will more than double to 105 million in 24 years, equaling the present population of all of Nigeria, according to US Census Bureau projections. The north, growing at only a slightly lower rate, will nearly double its population to reach 72 million over the same period. The smaller 18 million population of the middle belt states—still larger than 80 percent of African countries—will also almost double to reach 35 million during this time frame. Coupled with what the US Embassy reports has been the slow erosion of its political superiority, the north's relatively smaller population could become another weakness that southerners might seize upon to loosen the northern grip on the central government.

Although growth is explosive in all regions, the percentage shares of the total population of the north and of the middle belt are slowly dropping, a result of an expanding flow of predominantly young migrants seeking jobs and education in the cities of the south,

according to population studies. The southwest, home to the Yoruba tribe and the site of the capital, Lagos, is the fastest growing and most Westernized area in Nigeria. The outmigration of the most able northern youth, along with the more general perception that the south could overwhelm the north by sheer numbers, almost certainly adds to the frustration and distrust of the established northern elites toward the more aggressive southern tribesmen.

### Religious Divisiveness

A deepening of ethnic and regional divisiveness could provoke a surge in religious tensions as well. Never far from the surface, and often paralleling ethnic and regional factionalism—with Muslim influence centered in the north among the Hausa-Fulani people and Christianity predominant in the south—divisive religious issues often take on the air of a north-south confrontation, according to the US Embassy. Moreover, intense ethnoreligious frictions often result in localized violence, when pockets of Christians in the north—usually members of minority tribes—come under attack by Muslim Hausa-Fulani, according to numerous reports from Western missionaries and Nigerian officials.<sup>3</sup>

Western and Nigerian sociologists report, however, that among the Yoruba of the southwest, where Christians and Muslims each account for about 40 percent of the population, religious tensions are diffused by a strong acceptance of their common Yoruba culture and tradition. Nevertheless, we agree with the US Embassy that on national issues, where religious affiliation often has ethnic and regional implications, the Christian and Muslim communities tend to stand together, each fearing encroachment and domination by the other.

Given the pressures building from declining oil revenues and a shrinking economy, religious and ethnic strife could intensify unless the government is seen as evenhanded and meticulously neutral, according to

<sup>3</sup> In 1966, just prior to the civil war, an estimated 30,000 Ibo living in the north were killed by northern mobs and another 1 million fled to safety in the eastern region following an Ibo-led coup attempt that claimed the lives of several senior northern religious and political figures.

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**Regionalism and the Population Census Fiascoes**

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Regionalism played a decisive role in the failures of four population censuses since the early 1950s. The politicization of the census process by regional power brokers has resulted in counts so obviously biased that none is able to stand as a reasonable population estimate, according to US and Nigerian scholars. Nigeria has officially accepted only the 1963 census, disregarding or officially repudiating the other three.

Controversies over census counts began before independence when the 1952-53 enumeration found 30 million people, with 55 percent attributed to the northern region, according to census historians. US and Nigerian academics report that southerners protested, charging that colonial authorities had inflated the northern total in order to achieve a northern majority in the Federal House of Assembly. Southern politicians expected that the next census would favor the south, thereby setting the record straight, according to the academics. Demographers today agree that the population was undercounted by at least 10 percent, even though undercounts are highly unusual in Third World countries. Further, a reliable differentiation of population as belonging either to the north or south is technically impossible because of the incompleteness of the data.

The 1962 census was more of a political debacle than the previous one, in our view, doing little to reassure southerners that they had finally received a fair enumeration. Although the results were never published, it is understood by population specialists that the national count was 45 million, of whom 22 million were in the north. Nevertheless, the Federal Census Office announced that the north officially contained 31 million people, giving it nearly 70

percent of the population. The enumeration throughout the eastern region was described as "false and inflated," and failure to enumerate large areas of the western region was laid to weaknesses in the regional organization—the census document reports that the western region was under a state of emergency and the regional government was suspended during the enumeration period. Rising political turmoil forced the federal prime minister to acknowledge the failure of the census and announce plans for a new count, according to the United Nations.

The recount in 1963 was both a demographic and a political failure, in the opinion of most US and Nigerian scholars. The final results appear to have been produced by the determination of all regions to match the east's capacity for falsification the year before, according to academic reports. The vastly inflated total population was announced to be 56 million people, nearly 54 percent of them in the north. The growth rate between 1953 and 1963 was calculated at 6.3 percent annually, a demographic absurdity for a country that did not have massive immigration, according to UN demographers.

Miscounting the population had become an accepted political ploy by 1963, used as yet another way of swaying official decisions on political and development issues, in our view. Regional politicians publicized the 1962 census as the basis that would determine political representation and establish claims to public services, according to population and development specialists. The resulting willingness, and indeed, the enthusiasm with which ordinary people falsified the census record shows the extent to which the regional politicians were able to mobilize local support of regional rather than national interests.

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*The 1973 census, conducted in the buoyant atmosphere of rising oil revenues and successful recovery from the civil war, had perhaps the best chance of success. It was one of the necessary measures for a return to civilian rule and would have provided the statistical base for the distribution of social and economic services under an ambitious development plan, according to international development planners. The military government, in an effort to ensure a complete and accurate count, deployed the Army to accompany census enumerators in the field, according to Nigerian census experts. Nonetheless, complaints that northern troops coerced the populace and slanted the enumeration in favor of the north arose from all quarters and the stage was set for yet another failure, according to Nigerian newspaper accounts. The implausible national total was overlooked as public attention again focused on the regional numbers. According to the official count, the six northern states had grown by nearly 6 percent and comprised 64 percent of the population, while the south showed only negligible growth; the populations in the south-western and southeastern states were smaller than in 1963. The outcome was unacceptable to most Nigerians and the census was officially declared null and void, an action few countries have taken, according to UN records.*

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*Both US and Nigerian demographers report that, since 1973, census taking has been effectively removed from the national agenda. Political representation and economic policies are shaped by using the token results of the 1963 census, corrected by additional data from sample surveys.*

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the US Embassy. Yet, the Babangida regime already has stirred controversy by opening religious questions to national debate, according to press reports. We agree with the US Embassy's assessment that tension between religious groups has been fueled by issues such as Nigerian membership in the OIC, the question of whether southern states should have civil courts using Islamic law, the problem of religious schools, and the disagreement on the duties of a secular state. These tensions were already high in northern cities, where thousands of lives have been lost in the last six years in sectarian riots, according to US Embassy reporting. The Nigerian press reports that local incidents of church burnings in Muslim areas and other forms of religious harassment continue to occur despite calls for tolerance by state officials and traditional leaders. Muslim elders keep a watchful eye on potentially violent groups like the Muslim Student Society in order to help control the volatile youth population, according to US Embassy reports.

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#### Explosive City Growth

Nigeria's cities are especially vulnerable to demographic pressures. One outcome of rapid growth is that internal migration will increase and rural migrants will flood the cities, contributing to already deteriorating living conditions amid increasingly inadequate public services, high unemployment, and elevated crime levels. High population growth, low living standards, and limited opportunities are some of the factors that create a climate conducive to political instability, in our view.

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Fed by the inflow of rural migrants, cities throughout the country are likely to continue to grow at the rapid annual pace of nearly 4.5 percent for the next two decades. The urban share of the total population will rise from a current level of about one-third to slightly over 40 percent soon after the turn of the century, according to US Census Bureau projections. We believe conditions in the countryside will continue to provide the impetus for large-scale migration to the

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### *Economic and Social Disparities*

*Population growth is not the only factor affecting regional cohesion. Keeping the lid on regional jealousies and charges of government favoritism remain a major challenge for the regime in Lagos. Every government since 1970 has attempted to overcome traditional inequities and promote the appearance of regional fairness in the distribution of economic goods and social services in order to allay tribal and regional tensions and muster broad support.*

*The provision of social services, especially health care and education, is an indicator of modernity and the quality of life, and represents to the majority of people the degree to which the national government serves them, according to numerous studies by social scientists. Nevertheless, regional balance has not been achieved in the social-service sector, as demonstrated by the movement of migrants to the south. Although social data are woefully inadequate, our review of the available information suggests that the north and the middle belt have been shortchanged in both health care and education, with the regions still suffering from historical disparities that date back to the colonial*

*period and not addressed by the northern elite who have been in power after independence. Nigerian official statistics show that, while only 35 percent of the Nigerian population is covered by any form of modern health services, the north, with only a 14-percent share of hospital facilities, and the middle belt with 11 percent, get only a small piece of an already small pie.*

*In education, the south again enjoys the largest share of opportunities, especially in training beyond the primary level. In the early 1980s, northerners comprised 35 percent of the national population, but only about one-fourth of the national primary school enrollment was in the north, and only 9 percent of all secondary students were northerners, according to Ministry of Education data. This is partly due to a cultural bias against nonreligious schooling in the northern states, but academic studies indicate that this is changing. Northerners now bitterly complain about rising school costs for modern education, according to US Embassy reporting. The middle belt's 17 percent of the population has fared somewhat better, with 22 percent of primary school enrollment and 10 percent of secondary school enrollees.*

*cities, where migrants account for slightly over 40 percent of all urban growth. Numerous academic studies show that migrants believe economic and educational opportunities lacking in the rural areas can be found in the cities, and that urban housing and social services will raise their standard of living. Demographic studies estimate that massive migration occurred over the last decade—on the order of 5 million people—and despite deplorable economic and social conditions in many large cities, migration could increase to over three times that in the next 10 years.*

*Its characterization in numerous open sources shows that Lagos is an international symbol of rapid growth and chaotic urban life. Average annual growth rates*

*of 7 percent over the last 20 years raised the city's population from 1.5 million in 1966 to the current 6 million, according to the US Census Bureau. This very high sustained growth would have been closer to 10 percent if large numbers of illegal aliens had not been expelled during the last three years. The US Census Bureau estimates that 80 percent of the aliens expelled from Nigeria were expelled from Lagos, as many as 1.6 million in 1983 and 560,000 in 1985. Although the growth rate of the city has dropped somewhat to about 5.5 percent per year, projections indicate nearly 16.5 million people in Lagos within 20 years.*

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The potential for serious urban unrest already exists in Lagos, but will increase over the longer term, in our view. The federal government commits significant portions of economic development funds to the capital, but many parts of the city are without water, electricity, waste disposal, or good roads, according to economic studies. Lagos is crime-ridden despite severe penalties imposed for robbery and lesser crimes, according to local newspaper accounts and studies by UN organizations. The demand for housing and transportation has far outstripped the supply, resulting in sprawling slums and squatter settlements interspersed among better neighborhoods and, on occasion, massive traffic jams. A recent UN study reported that a substantial percentage of the people were still illiterate, and only a small portion had education beyond the primary level. The unemployed are concentrated in the 15- to 29-year group, and of those employed at any age more than 50 percent are in the informal sector working for very low wages as petty traders, roadside mechanics, or the like, according to the study. Still, migrants from the rural areas continue to pour into the city, over 1 million of them in the past 10 years, accounting for 44 percent of city growth, according to estimates by the US Census Bureau. Many of these migrants, along with communities of West African aliens, congregate in specific localities chosen for affinity with family, village of origin, or tribe, where ethnic enmities often flare in the competition for limited jobs and services. [ ]

The long-held plan to build a new federal capital in Abuja, 1,100 kilometers from Lagos near the center of the country, has been heralded since 1962 as the answer to the congestion in Lagos and a means of making government accessible to more people, according to UN documents and Nigerian newspaper reports. Although the first federal ministry began its move to Abuja in June 1986, with three others slated to move this year, much of the planned construction has been abandoned because of the government's failure to pay the contractors, according to the US Embassy. The lack of housing, schools, infrastructure, and telephones and deteriorating sanitation in what has been a dormant city for several years will continue to slow the transfer of the majority of ministries, according to US officials. An International Labor Office study points out that, so long as Lagos remains

the financial center and principal transportation hub for the country, it will continue to grow and draw a significant share of migrants. In our view, Lagos will continue to command a substantial share of urban resources to keep it a viable center of the Nigerian economy and government for some years to come. [ ]

While other large cities may be less critical to the central government from an economic and political standpoint, they nevertheless are of key concern to regional and ethnic-based political constituents, and are likely locations for urban unrest, in our view. Most are afflicted by problems similar to those in Lagos, but on a smaller scale. Kano State officials last year blamed an influx of rural jobseekers into Kano City and other smaller towns for rising tensions in the region as the newcomers competed with longtime residents for limited jobs. City officials also cited an inadequate educational system that has failed to train the rising numbers of unskilled, unemployed workers. Moreover, while growth is slower than in Lagos, the population of Kano City will more than double in the next 20 years, from 813,000 to 1.8 million, with migrants comprising somewhat more than 20 percent of the total increase, according to US Census Bureau projections. [ ]

#### **Outlook and Implications for the United States**

Current demographic trends indicate that Nigeria's rapid population growth and pervasive social problems will continue unabated for several decades, and we believe governments will be unable to stem the consequent erosion of living standards. Problems arising from large annual population increments and deepening societal divisiveness are likely to create an environment conducive to mounting unrest among volatile youths—especially students and the unemployed—the urban poor, ethnic and religious factions, and radical Muslim fringe groups [ ]

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### **US and Nigerian Mutual Concerns**

*Although Nigeria supplied only 5.6 percent of US oil imports in 1985, Lagos remains an important source of crude oil located outside the Persian Gulf and relatively accessible to the United States and its Western allies. In the event of disruption in the supply of oil from the Gulf, Nigeria almost immediately could increase production from the present average of about 1.5 million barrels per day (b/d) to 2.2 million b/d within a few months, according to the US Embassy. The exposure of US banks in Nigeria is over \$1 billion, according to US Federal Reserve data. US-Nigerian trade rose during 1985 to some \$3.1 billion, while Nigeria emerged as the fifth-largest importer of US wheat.*

*As one of black Africa's most influential nations, Nigeria also can serve as a useful ally for the United States in Third World forums. US Embassy officials report that the current regime of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida hopes to bring Nigeria closer to the West and repeatedly seeks US advice and assistance. In return, Lagos has offered to support US policies in southern Africa, and more recently—despite Libyan efforts to bring pressure on the president through Nigerian Muslim leaders—Nigeria refused to denounce US antiterrorist action against Libya, according to US Embassy sources.*

It appears unlikely to us that the government will be able or willing to commit major resources to slowing population growth. In particular, we doubt that top officials will risk the almost certain divisiveness that would be set off by their backing a policy calling for family planning. Although some Muslim leaders say that family planning is allowed under Koranic law, fundamentalist groups would be sure to charge that family planning is a plan by Christian southerners to weaken Islam. Moreover, both Christian and Muslim Nigerians would probably object to such a policy as Western interference in traditional African life. We expect the regime to pay lipservice, but little more, to the urgings of Western donors to inaugurate an effective population program.

The size and growth of the youth population constitute Nigeria's most volatile demographic problem, in our view. Expectations of young men and women for greater opportunities and a high standard of living were raised during the years of rising oil revenues and a booming economy.

We see no indication that the ever-larger youth population no longer expects to receive the education and jobs that will lead to a better life. This group is likely to become increasingly impatient with and vengeful about its lot. Student protests, such as the violent ones in late May, for example, are likely to occur more frequently.

Discontent in Lagos and other fast-growing cities is likely to reach dangerous levels as competition for education, health care, and jobs exacerbates tensions between various ethnic, religious, and generational groups. Inept administration, bad planning, and non-existent or unworkable transportation, water, sanitation, and power systems are likely to add to urban frustrations and focus attention on the shortcomings of both the local and federal governments. Further, we believe urban groups will become increasingly vulnerable to mobilization by radical political or religious activists who blame Nigeria's moderate leaders for the country's problems.

In this environment of increasing demands and shrinking resources, intensifying religious and north-south differences could make Nigeria an attractive target for external subversion by regimes hostile to moderate African governments.

Muslim fringe groups in several African countries are particularly vulnerable to Libyan infiltration, money, and influence. According to US officials, Iran also actively recruits candidates in Nigeria for military and religious training and periodically introduces radical Muslim propaganda on university campuses. We believe heightened domestic unrest in Nigeria would tempt Libya and Iran to seek common cause with Nigeria's Islamic north. For example, Libyan and Iranian support could encourage Muslim leaders to step up their demands for the imposition of an Islamic state and thereby create a climate for increased Muslim-Christian violence.

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Nigerian leaders, faced with dividing a shrinking economic pie, will almost certainly turn to Western governments and international financial institutions for increased levels of assistance. Moreover, Lagos would probably argue, correctly in our view, that social, economic, and political turmoil will provide growing opportunities for meddling by Libya and Iran, particularly in the northern, Muslim areas of the country.

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If, as seems likely, Nigerian authorities remain incapable of confronting population problems, slowing economic decline, and finding a formula for national unity and social peace, we believe the prospects for serious regional and ethnic conflict will escalate. In a worst case scenario, the Nigerian federation over time could split along religious and ethnic lines. Violence—like that during the Biafra war, which took over a million lives and destroyed the former Eastern Region's economy—would probably spread throughout the country, damaging or isolating oil installations and undermining Lagos's ability to counter external meddling. Ethnic, regional, or religious factions seeking outside support would probably find the USSR, Libya, and Iran ready and willing to help to try to install a radical government—or even an Islamic revolutionary state modeled on the Iranian experience.

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